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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests some things caring educators can do to promote quality instruction that prevents, or at least lessens, the incidence of school failure in minority children. The paper first describes the James Comer School Development Program, which connects minority children to caring adults. The program focuses on community, parents, church, and school as valuable resources for developing students' psycho-emotional, social, and intellectual aspects of learning. It then incorporates the School Development Program with staff development efforts to promote effective literacy learning for the children of the Westbury (New York) School District. Some of the staff development efforts discussed in the paper are monthly grades 3-5 staff workshops, as well as observation and participation in classroom lessons by university educators. The paper outlines the following recommendations from workshop participants: faculty from the C.W. Post School of Education should conduct comparable workshops for the K-3 staff so that all elementary teachers are on the "same page"; Westbury staff is encouraged to connect workshop activities to curriculum development and to align curricular outcomes to the New York State Education Department's standards for English language arts; college faculty should continue to nurture Westbury's learning environments; college faculty and Westbury staff need to develop stronger partnerships with parents so that all key players are supporting children's literacy learning; and both formal and informal assessment should be administered to determine the effects of professional development and parental involvement on student achievement. (Contains 51 references.) (NKA)

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Promoting Effective Literacy Learning in Minority Students by Connecting Teacher Workshops to the Comer Process

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As we enter the new millennium, one of our greatest challenges is to successfully educate minority children. These learners usually encounter difficulty in school because the culture of their home is substantially different from the culture of their school. This regrettable mismatch is sometimes called the theory of cultural discontinuity (Au, 1993), and it may be demonstrated in the way teachers interact with children and ask them to do classroom work (Diller, 1999). Such a perspective suggests that when family and school cultures are different—and might even clash—students' at-risk situation is exacerbated because they do not have the types of experiences that the school expects for success. Students, however, are not inherently at risk of failure; rather, they are entangled in an at-risk context (Levin, 1992; Sanacore, 1994; Sanacore & Wilsusen, 1995). As caring educators, what can we do to promote quality instruction that prevents, or at least lessens, the incidence of school failure in minority children?

Understanding Minority Children

Recently, a white teacher shared her poignant journey in reaching out to African American students. Diller (1999) learned that understanding the culture of her students is necessary for teaching them effectively. Fortunately, her African American friend, who is also a teacher in her school, provided useful insights about the importance of acknowledging that African American students are different and, therefore, require a different response to their learning needs. From this extended dialogue and from her continued experiences—with children, parents, colleagues, multicultural children's literature, and professional literature—Diller realized she must adapt her teaching rather than force students to change. For example, she provided a structured classroom

environment with more opportunities for physical movement and interaction (Delpit, 1992). Specifically, she highlighted cooperative activities, rhythm and rhyme, movement, and interactive discussion. As Diller adapted her teaching and learning environment, she observed more students succeed. In retrospect, teachers who take time from their busy schedules to understand their students' cultural backgrounds increase the chances of successfully reaching 'hese students. Not surprisingly, when caring adults treat all children as viable members of the learning community, children from a variety of cultures benefit from the same opportunities that Diller provided for her African American students.

The School Development Program: A Brief Perspective

Recently, I was appointed Literacy Program Director for The Annenberg Foundation Comprehensive School-Reform Collaboration among the C.W. Post School of Education, Yale University School Development Program, and Westbury (NY) School District. One of my roles is to work cooperatively with the key players—professors, administrators, teachers, children, parents, and community—to provide Westbury's children with optimal conditions for literacy learning. A major component that supports this direction is the James Comer School Development Program, which connects minority children to caring adults ((Comer 1997a, 1997b, 1998; Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes, & Joyner, 1999; Comer, Haynes, Joyner, Ben-Avie, 1996; Haynes, 1998; Lofland, 1995; Ramirez-Smith, 1995; Sanacore, 1999; Squires and Kranyik, 1995/1996). The program focuses on community, parents, church, and school as valuable resources for developing students' psycho-emotional, social, and intellectual aspects of learning.

The School Development Program acknowledges students' total development as being vitally important for success in school and in life. Support for this holistic perspective is comprehensive and involves six developmental pathways (social, psychological, language, cognitive, ethical, and physical), three governance teams (School Planning and Management Team, Student and Staff Support Team, and Parent Team), three guiding principles (collaboration, consensus, and no-fault), and three operations (Comprehensive School Plan, staff development, and assessment and modification). These program elements can have a positive impact on student achievement, especially when they are mediated by such essential school climate dimensions as respect and trust, sensitivity and caring, high expectations, strong achievement motivation, collaborative spirit, order and discipline, effective leadership, positive student interpersonal relationships, and supportive teacher-student relationships (Haynes, 1998). In this paper, I incorporate aspects of the School Development Program with staff development efforts to promote effective literacy learning for the children of the Westbury School District.

Teacher Workshops

Fortunately, the Annenberg Foundation provided a grant to improve the literacy environment of the Westbury School District, which is an urbanized suburban school system located near New York City. This initiative involves a partnership with the Long Island University C.W. Post School of Education, Yale University School Development Program, and Westbury School District. The Drexel Avenue School and Powell's Lane School immediately joined the initiative. The children who attend these grades 3-5 elementary schools are 44.3% African Americans, 35.6% Hispanic Americans, 14.2% Haitian Americans, 3.6% White Americans, 2.0% Asian Americans, and 0.3% other

Americans. Many dedicated approaches are used to support the children's total development, including teacher workshops to enhance the children's literacy-learning.

A foundation for the workshops was established during the Westbury School District's Conference Day, which focused on the Comer School Development Program and its positive connections to children's psychological, social, and academic growth. One of the sessions highlighted the literacy component supported by the Annenberg Foundation grant. Staff from the Drexel Avenue School and Powell's Lane School attended the literacy session, conducted by a faculty member of the C.W. Post School of Education. The presenter gave an overview that highlighted the improvement of children's literacy through caring relationships with adults. Then, the Comer School Development Program and its link to literacy and caring were discussed. This discussion helped the participants realize the value of continuing the conversation during the school year so that additional insights are gained and applied to the classroom setting. Fortunately, continual dialogue is facilitated by the Westbury School District's commitment to monthly half-day workshops.

To plan effectively for the workshops, the participants completed a needs assessment consisting of potential activities and priorities that might enhance the staff's effectiveness in reaching out to a diverse community of learners with a variety of strengths and needs. Specifically, the survey provided opportunities for rank ordering a number of topics for enriching Westbury's learning environment. These topics included (but were not limited to): (a) focusing on interactive approaches that help students to be piqued, both socially and cognitively (e.g., readers' and writers' workshop); (b) stressing such schema-building strategies as PreP (prereading plan), structured overview,

semantic mapping, semantic feature analysis, anticipation guides, and K-W-L; (c) encouraging metacognitive awareness so that independence is attained in monitoring progress and in correcting blocks to learning; (d) providing students at risk of failure with opportunities for resiliency; (e) developing integrated study units that are structured by themes; (f) selecting and developing multi-level resources concerning different interests and needs; (g) using portfolios to enhance instruction and assessment; (h) reinforcing important connections between the reading and writing processes; (i) organizing instruction with literature circles, strategy groups, cooperative learning groups, grand conversations, individual conferences, whole-class discussions, and other flexible patterns; (j) supporting parent/school partnerships for improving teaching and learning; and (k) establishing professional libraries in the schools. The participants also had opportunities to suggest additional topics and to make comments about the process and content of staff development. After completing the survey, the participants focused on the need for intimately connecting workshop topics to the Westbury culture so that educators can work effectively with students, parents, community members, and colleagues to promote a successful literacy-learning environment.

This intimate perspective supported the notion of reflective practice because it stressed the importance of extending workshop activities to classroom instruction. The C.W. Post presenter assured the participants that he and his associates would be available to (a) meet with administrators and teachers and share important aspects of teaching and learning, (b) observe and participate in instructional lessons and provide teachers with related feedback, (c) guide a peer-coaching process so that teachers develop the habit of making informal classroom observations and engaging colleagues in related

conversations, (d) help administrators and teachers maintain a journal that represents their growing awareness of teaching and learning and their documentation of changes in classroom practice and student performance, and (e) support efforts to organize study groups as a complement to workshop sessions. These scaffolds were considered to be vital for encouraging professional growth and eventual independence.

The stage was now set for monthly workshops involving the grades 3-5 staff of the Drexel Avenue School and Powell's Lane School. Substitute teachers provided release time for classroom teachers who attended morning or afternoon sessions. This split schedule reduced the number of grade-level participants and therefore encouraged more opportunities for interacting, sharing, and learning. For example, on October 4, 1999, third grade teachers attended either a morning or an afternoon session; on October 5 and 6, fourth and fifth grade teachers, respectively, were given the same opportunity. In addition, the workshop presenter and his associates had time to visit the two elementary schools and to guide the process of reflective practice during the next several weeks preceding the November workshops. Both principals and teachers considered these visitations to be essential for connecting workshop topics to classroom activities. Owing to the space limitations of this article, only three months of workshops are described. Monthly workshops, however, were carried out during the entire school year. In addition, the following workshop descriptions represent summaries of activities rather than elaborations of morning and afternoon sessions for every grade level in each school. When appropriate, important variations are presented, along with meaningful links to the School Development Program.

Workshop 1: During the first session, the participants discussed the overall design of the workshops and then reached consensus about organizing the workshops around three activities: a focused presentation concerning a rank-ordered priority topic from the needs assessment, a time for sharing and applying related information, and a discussion about what should be highlighted at the next workshop. Since the first priority that the staff established was to provide students with opportunities for resiliency, the presenter was prepared to focus on this topic. Initially, educational resiliency was defined as "the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences" (Wang, Haertel, and Walberb,1994, p. 46). Then, this definition was broadened to include such criteria as academics, classroom behavior, and attendance (Padron, Waxman, and Huang, 1999).

Complementing this perspective were research designs that not only provided useful findings but also presented useful methods that can be applied to the Westbury context. For example, the workshop participants enjoyed learning about the My Class Inventory (Dryden & Fraser, 1996; Fraser, Anderson, &Walberg, 1982; Fraser & O'Brien, 1985), which assesses students' perceptions of the classroom learning environment. This inventory consists of five scales represented by 30 items. The items are read to students, who circle either "Yes" or "No." Padron, Waxman, and Huang, (1999, p. 71) used the My Class Inventory in their study of resilient and nonresilient minority students in grades four and five. These researchers also provided the following brief description of the scales and sample items:

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- Satisfaction: the extent of students' enjoyment of classwork (e.g., I enjoy the schoolwork in my reading class).
- Friction: the amount of tension and quarreling among students (e.g., Some students in my reading class pick on me).
- Competition: the emphasis on students competing with each other (e.g., I try to be first to finish the classwork in reading).
- Difficulty: the extent to which students find difficulty with the work of the class (e.g., In my reading class, the work is hard for me to do).
- Cohesion: the extent to which students know, help, and are friendly toward each other (e.g., In my class, I often work with other students).

In addition to the My Class Inventory, Padron, Waxman, and Huang (1999) used the Classroom Observation Schedule (Waxman, Wang, Lindvall, & Anderson, 1988), which the workshop participants also considered to be useful. Designed to systematically obtain information about students' behaviors, the Classroom Observation Schedule helps educators to document behaviors while "instructional learning processes" are occurring. Specifically, individual learners are observed in reference to interactions (e.g., with other students or with the teacher), selection of activity (e.g., teacher-assigned or student-selected), type of activity (e.g., writing or reading), setting (e.g., whole-class or small-group), manner (e.g., on-task or off-task), and language used (e.g., English or Spanish). This last, added section was used in the Padron, Waxman, and Huang (1999) study and in the Drexel Avenue School and Powell's Lane School workshops because the primary language of many students is Spanish.

After developing an understanding of both the My Class Inventory and the Classroom Observation Schedule, the workshop participants were also interested in the results of this study, which included the following highlights (Padron, Waxman, & Huang, 1999, p. 73):

> The results indicate that the resilient student group scored significantly higher on Satisfaction than the nonresilient group and that there was no significant difference between resilient and average student groups or between average and nonresilient groups on Satisfaction. Nonresilient students scored significantly higher on Difficulty than average and resilient students. Average students also scored significantly higher than resilient students in the Difficulty scale. There were no significant differences among the three student groups on the Friction, Competition, and Cohesion scales.

The results also indicated that classroom activities were directed by teachers more than 95% of the time and that the whole-class setting was used more than 75% of the time. Not surprisingly, time on task varied greatly—e.g., resilient (85%) and nonresilient (61%)—as did time off task.

Afterward, the participants reflected on these results and connected them to their own classroom practice. Some of the participants indicated that they were using readers'/writers' workshop and other interactive approaches to support their students' growth in literacy learning. Most of the teachers, however, said that they often used direct instruction with whole-class activities because these approaches gave them a sense of control over classroom discipline as well as teaching and learning. They also admitted

that at least half of their students were experiencing much difficulty and limited enjoyment with literacy-oriented activities.

The teachers who attended the fourth grade workshops were especially vocal about this teaching-learning dilemma, which suggested a significant mismatch between the children's developmental needs and the school district's instructional expectations. Apparently, the new English Language Arts Assessments for grades 4, 8, and 11, which are required by the New York State Education Department, were placing excessive stress on teachers to prepare students for high performance on the new tests. This stress resulted in classroom teachers conducting lessons at the fourth grade level, even though more than half of the children were reading and writing several years below grade placement. According to the workshop participants, this gap between the challenges (or frustrations) of the lessons and the current performance level of the students was caused by the district office staff, who perceived this context to represent high student expectations. On the contrary, the teachers not only perceived this context as developmentally inappropriate for the children, but also asked the workshop presenter to represent their position during meetings with the district office staff and the School Development Program's School Planning and Management Team.

Toward the last part of the October workshop, the participants agreed to expend time and energy during the next several weeks (a) using a variety of criteria—e.g., academics, classroom behavior, and attendance—to identify three resilient and three nonresilient students; (b) applying a variation of the My Class Inventory and the Classroom Observation Schedule to gain additional insights, respectively, about students' perceptions of the classroom learning environment and about students' classroom

behaviors; and (c) exploring professional literature that provides strategies for enhancing resiliency in all learners. Among the suggested readings were Bernard's (1993) "Fostering Resiliency in Kids," Bruce's (1995) "Fostering Resiliency in Students: Positive Action Strategies for Classroom Teachers," and Sanacore's (1992) "Intraclass Grouping with a Whole-Language Thrust." The participants also were committed to maintaining a reflective journal concerning their growing awareness of resiliency and their documentation of students' growth with resiliency. Everyone agreed that these considerations should be highlighted at next month's workshop.

Workshop 2: At the beginning of this workshop, the presenter indicated that he met with the district office staff and discussed the classroom teachers' perspective concerning student expectations and testing preparation. This discussion focused on the gap in the children's current reading and writing performance and the new English Language Arts Assessment for grade four. Fortunately, the district office staff was receptive to the teachers' perspective, and this cooperation led to an agreement in which teachers were given the freedom to (a) provide children with developmentally appropriate instruction that is matched with their learning strengths and needs and (b) accelerate instruction accordingly so that all children have opportunities to make rapid progress in their literacy development.

This perspective was then presented to the School Development Program's School Planning and Management Teams of the Drexel Avenue School and Powell's Lane School. Among the teams' many responsibilities is the development of a Comprehensive School Plan, which serves as a blueprint for action for the school year. "It delineates the academic, social climate, and community relations goals as well as the

activities to achieve them" (Haynes, 1998, p. 6). As of this writing, the developmentally appropriate perspective is being considered for inclusion in the Comprehensive School Plan for both elementary schools.

After discussing these events with the workshop participants, the presenter engaged the group in a discussion of how important aspects of resiliency (which was last month's topic) were incorporated into the grades 3-5 classrooms. As teachers shared their reflective journals, they initially highlighted their identification of resilient and nonresilient students and their use of the My Class Inventory and the Classroom Observation Schedule. Not surprisingly, the use of these two instruments generated data suggesting that the nonresilient children were more likely to experience decreased satisfaction with classwork and increased difficulty and frustration with learning activities than were the resilient children. Time on task was also a concern, with nonresilient students less focused on instructional tasks than resilient students.

In addition to these assessment considerations, the participants' reflective journals included valuable information concerning intervention strategies. For example, a third grade teacher motivated a mixed group of resilient and nonresilient children to write a story. After reading aloud a work of children's literature, the teacher invited the group to collectively develop their own story. As these budding coauthors dictated their story, the teacher recorded each child's sentence on a language experience chart and then placed the child's initials (in parentheses) after his or her contribution. The children were so enthusiastic about receiving this type of recognition, that they continued to make contributions during this extended writing activity. The completed story was then revised and edited by the children, and the final version was posted in the hall. Undoubtedly, this

activity helped the children to be active participants in the writing act and to develop self-efficacy and self-esteem as writers. The third grade teacher's final reflection indicated that throughout this collaborative process, all the children were so engaged in writing that she was unable to distinguish between the resilient and nonresilient students she initially identified.

Complementing this literacy event was a fourth grade teacher's reflective journal, which focused on giving children a choice of the order in which they wanted to participate in different subject areas. Both resilient and nonresilient students were genuinely treated as individuals as they indicated their preferences for science, English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and other content fields. The children then met in mixed groups during the school day and engaged in activities related to their instructional preferences. By the end of the school day, the children were as enthusiastic about participating in their last content area as they were about engaging in their first. The teacher attributed this full-day enthusiasm, which was apparent in all curricular areas, to the children's happiness about having their choices respected.

Happiness was also evident in a fifth grade teacher's reflective journal, which described opportunities for students to serve as peer tutors. In this arrangement, resilient and nonresilient students were placed in leadership roles—tutors, captains, and table leaders—and designated "expert" status. Regardless of their limitations, all the children were supported equitably as they planned and carried out their responsibilities as peer tutors.

These and other literacy events were verified by the workshop presenter and his associates from the C.W. Post School of Education. Collectively, they observed and participated in classroom activities related to the assessment and enhancement of children's resiliency.

With this foundation established, the next workshop activity highlighted connections between reading and writing. This topic not only complemented the previous focus on resiliency but also reflected the participants' second priority on the needs assessment. Although the participants were interested in learning more about reading and writing connections, they were particularly concerned about matching related instructional activities to students' cultural backgrounds. Since a large percentage of Westbury's students are African American, Hispanic, and Haitian, and since many of them are English language learners (or limited in their use of English), the workshop presenter introduced readers' theater as one inclusive approach to meeting the needs of these students. While not a panacea, readers' theater is well-matched with multicultural perspectives and is sensitive to children whose native language is not English (Leu & Kinzer, 1999; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998/1999; Wolf, 1993).

Initially, the presenter gave a brief rationale for using readers' theater. For example, this instructional method can be applied to narrative and expository text as it improves children's fluency and meaning making. It also accommodates varied reading and interest levels and connects reading, writing, listening, and speaking in an interactive context that is both interesting and meaningful. In addition, it provides opportunities for practicing cooperative learning in flexible groups and, simultaneously, for developing

positive student interpersonal relationships, one of the essential school climate dimensions of the School Development Program (Haynes, 1998).

Afterward, the presenter reviewed a 5-day plan for readers' theater, which was used effectively by Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1998/1999). Although this plan highlighted efforts to develop fluency in second graders, it can be applied easily across grade levels. Furthermore, it is sufficiently structured to give many of the Westbury teachers a sense of comfort as they make a transition from direct instruction and whole-class activities to small-group instruction. Teachers who decide to carry out this 5-day plan select three stories and develop scripts for each. Then, they follow a structured format consisting of:

Day 1 Teacher models fluency by reading aloud the stories on which the week's scripts are based.

Teacher offers a brief minilesson that presents explicit explanation of some aspect of fluency.

The teacher and students discuss each of the three stories.

Students begin to practice reading personal copies of scripts, reading all the parts independently.

Teacher encourages students to take these unmarked scripts home for further practice.

Day 2 Students gather in repertory groups. Teacher provides scripts for each group with specific parts highlighted.

Students read the script, taking a different part with each reading.

Teacher circulates among the three repertory groups, coaching and

providing feedback.

Day 3 Procedures are the same as for Day 2.

During the final five minutes, students within each repertory group negotiate and assign roles for Day 5's performance.

Teacher encourages children to pay special attention to their newly assigned performance role when practicing at home.

Day 4 Students read and reread the parts to which they are assigned within their repertory groups.

During the final 10 minutes, students make character labels and discuss where each will stand during the performance.

Day 5 Repertory groups "perform," reading before an audience. (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998/1999, p. 331)

When teachers and students develop confidence in using this version of readers' theater or if they already are comfortable with small interactive groups, they probably will appreciate other versions that provide more opportunities for student choice. The presenter therefore suggested the Leu and Kinzer (1999) approach, which involves a small group of children reading a narrative or expository text that either the children discovered or the teacher suggested. Then, the children write a short script that usually represents an exciting part in the selection. Next, they practice reading the script with expression, intonation, and eye or hand movements. They also experiment with different approaches to reading the lines of the script, and they decide on roles for the readers' theater performance. Finally, the students decide when they are ready to perform and if props are needed. Although this approach allows more student decision-making, Leu and

Kinzer (1999, p. 129) provide a caution: "Initially, readers' theater may require teacher direction and guidance, perhaps even teacher-directed scripts to be used as examples."

When the workshop participants demonstrated a grasp of readers' theater, they reflected on its application to a variety of children's literature. Initially, they discussed multicultural literature that they used successfully with their students, including *Abuela's Weave,* written by Omar Castaneda and illustrated by Enrique Sanchez; *The Animals of the Chinese Zodiac,* written by Susan Whitfield and illustrated by Philippa-Alys Browne; *The Araboolies of Liberty Street,* written by Sam Swope and illustrated by Barry Root; *Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later),* written by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard and illustrated by James Ransome; *Bud, Not Buddy,* written by Christopher Paul Curtis; *Family Pictures, Cuadros de Familia,* written and illustrated by Carmen Lomas Garza; *Go Free or Die: A Story of Harriet Tubman,* written by Jeri Ferris; *Night Owl and the Rooster: A Haitian Legend,* retold and illustrated by Charles Reasoner; *The Story of "Brave Bessie" Coleman: Nobody Owns the Sky,* written by Reeve Lindbergh and illustrated by Pamela Paparone; *Voices from the Fields: Children of Migrant Farmers Tell Their Stories,* edited by Beth Atkin; and *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears,* written by Verna Aardema and illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon. These and other multicultural resources represented different genres as well as varied interest and reading levels. Although the majority of these books are appropriate for primary-age children, Labbo and Field (1998, p. 466) "believe that picture books can be used at any grade, depending upon a combination of the curricular goals, book discussion, and extension activities." Similarly, the Westbury staff considered these materials to be useful for children in grades 3-5.

Afterward, the workshop participants agreed to apply readers' theater to children's books during the next several weeks. Depending on individuals' comfort zones, some decided to carry out an approach comparable to the one used in the Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1998/1999) study, whereas others felt comfortable incorporating a method similar to the one suggested by Leu and Linzer (1999). The participants also demonstrated a commitment to maintaining a reflective journal concerning their application of readers' theater and their students' response to it. They were eager to immerse students in this activity and to share related outcomes at next month's workshop, during which they also wanted to learn more about metacognition which was their next workshop priority on the needs assessment.

Workshop 3: During the beginning of this workshop, the participants were excited about sharing their experiences with readers' theater. For example, a third grade teacher's reflective journal indicated that after he described readers' theater activities, he read aloud *Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later).* A small group of children were so interested in this story that they decided to read it on their own and to write a script concerning an event in which the wind blew Aunt Flossie's "favorite best Sunday hat" into the water. Then, the children cooperatively made decisions concerning who would read certain parts and how those parts should be read. These third graders also practiced their parts in the classroom and at home, and they used a number of props, including a "best Sunday hat" and an imitation lake, during their presentation. Although the professional literature concerning readers' theater suggests minimizing props (Leu & Kinzer, 1999; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998/1999; Tompkins & McGee, 1993), the teacher believed that his students "benefited immensely" from developing and using

props. This assumption was based on his observations of the children during readers' theater activities and on his students' responses to the Checklist for Assessing Students' Multiple Intelligences, especially the Spatial Intelligence section (Armstrong, 1994).

Another positive experience with readers' theater was evident in a fourth grade teacher's reflective journal. Initially, she selected and wrote scripts for three children's books (one consisting of narrative text and two representing expository discourse). Then, she followed a five-day format comparable to the one used by Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1998/1999). During this process, the teacher monitored progress, maintained anecdotal records, and concluded that the children were more enthusiastic about readers' theater than they were about any activity she had used previously to foster a love of books. She also indicated, that after several practice sessions, "the children demonstrated no frustration in their attempts to develop fluency and negotiate meaning in their assigned roles." As an addendum to this reflection, the teacher discussed her own professional journey toward moving away from whole-class instruction as a dominant setting for instruction and embracing small-group activities as a complement to the learning environment.

Readers' theater was also carried out successfully in a fifth grade classroom. Here, the children considered readers' theater to be one of the options for Friday's sharing session. In this classroom, students were accustomed to meeting in cooperative learning groups for both academic and social purposes and were used to sharing related outcomes with the class every Friday. Thus, when the teacher introduced readers' theater and demonstrated its connection to *Red Dancing Shoes*, a group of children volunteered to read this warm story of an African-American family and to write a script for one of its

emotionally moving episodes. The children's experience with cooperative learning facilitated their varied roles in readers' theater, including their decision to perform the script on Friday. According to the teacher, "This repertory group thoroughly enjoyed their performance, and as important, their classmates realized another exciting option for Friday's sharing session."

These reflective journals and related discussions were verified by the workshop presenter and his associates. As they observed and participated in classroom activities that supported readers' theater, they enjoyed the active roles and conscious decisions in which students were engaged, including selecting books, writing scripts, experimenting with different ways of reading the lines of the scripts, determining how much practice was needed, and performing before an audience. Interestingly, this engaged energy represented students' increasing awareness of metacognitive aspects of learning, which was the next workshop topic.

Initially, metacognition was defined as "awareness and knowledge of one's mental processes, such that one can monitor, regulate, and direct them to a desired end; self-mediation." (Harris & Hodges, 1995) Then, the workshop participants discussed connections between metacognition and reading as they focused on "knowing when you know," "knowing what you know," "knowing what you need to know," "knowing the utility of active intervention," and "study-time utilization." (Brown, 1980) Since self-monitoring one's reading and listening is an important aspect of metacognition, the presenter linked this process to detecting contradictions in a text, identifying ideas that are misunderstood, and using appropriate strategies to "fix up" difficulties in understanding. Extending this perspective was a discussion of some of the self-

monitoring strategies that active learners use, including self-questioning, using prior knowledge, comparing key ideas, making mental images, concentrating on important information, and paraphrasing (Alvermann & Phelps, 1998; Baker & Brown, 1984; Brown & Campione, 1994; Brozo & Simpson, 1999).

Afterward, the workshop presenter and participants practiced a variety of approaches for blending metacognition and language arts. These approaches focused on teacher demonstrations of the following activities:

- Increasing awareness of narrative text (or story grammar). Prediction questions were blended with the story grammar of *Red Dancing Shoes* to promote an understanding of setting, characters, problem, action, and outcome. A useful source of support was a story map for structured preview, suggested by Cooper (2000).
- Increasing awareness of expository text. Similar to the narrative text activity, prediction questions were also demonstrated for expository or informational text, along with a graphic organizer connecting a social studies textbook chapter to Thomas and Robinson's (1977) PQ4R study strategy (preview, question, read, reflect, recite, and review). The graphic organizer, which helped to clarify this connection, was developed by the workshop presenter. Because expository discourse varies considerably, PQ4R was complemented with other graphic organizers that were applied to a variety of text structure, including cause and effect, sequence, problem and solution, description, and comparison (Robinson, 1983).
- Encouraging verbal reports of thought processes. Because struggling learners are unaware of their strategies, they need help in verbalizing their thoughts. This support can lead to awareness of the demands of literacy tasks as well as breakdowns in

comprehension. With this knowledge, struggling readers and writers can learn to use appropriate strategies for improving their response to learning.

According to Brozo and Simpson (1999), teachers should effectively demonstrate comprehension processes to students with special needs; however, teachers need to first become aware of their own thinking during literacy activities and to describe their thinking in terms their students will understand and emulate. The workshop participants therefore practiced demonstrations of their own thinking during reading so that their students would understand and use comparable thinking strategies. Support for this workshop activity consisted of content statements (or paraphrases of text) and metacomments (or statements describing the reader's thinking and meaning-making when he or she is immersed in text). The types of processing included making and checking predictions, using contextual strategies for word learning, imaging, linking prior knowledge to text, verbalizing points of confusion, and demonstrating fix-up strategies. For example, with linking prior knowledge to text, the content statement is "The truck broke down on their way to California. That reminds me of the time I was driving to Boston and …" The metacomment is "I'm thinking about something in my prior knowledge and experience that I can relate to what I'm reading so I can better understand it." Brozo and Simpson (1999, p. 426)

- Providing children with creative reminders. Since both teachers and children need reminders to use metacognitive strategies during literacy instruction, the presenter shared examples of strategy posters that readers and writers can refer to during classroom activities. These posters demonstrated the following areas: Identifying

Important Information in Stories, Identifying Important Information in Expository Text, Stop and Think, Summarizing Stories, Summarizing Informational Text, and Question Generating Strategy (Cooper, 2000).

Overall, the participants responded positively to the workshop activities. They also agreed to demonstrate metacognitive strategies during children's literacy learning and to encourage children to use these strategies. In addition, they were interested in maintaining reflective journals concerning this important journey and to share their journal entries during next month's workshop.

Advocating for Minority Children's Literacy Learning

Helping minority children to be successful literacy learners is a complex process, ranging from understanding these unique learners to providing them with a positive learning environment. The Comer School Development Program, if appropriately implemented, has the potential to bring the key players together to focus holistically on children's growth and development. One important operation of the Comer process is staff development, which is the highlight of this paper. Because of space limitations, I have provided summary descriptions of only three workshops that were conducted at the Drexel Avenue School and Powell's Lane School. Monthly workshops, however, continued for the entire school year as participants became immersed in rank-ordered topics from the needs assessment.

Supporting this direction were the efforts of the workshop presenter and his associates from the C.W. Post School of Education. In addition to conducting workshops, they observed and participated in classroom lessons and helped the Westbury staff apply insights that were gained from the workshop sessions. They also guided some

of the teachers to engage in the peer-coaching process, which enabled these volunteers to observe colleagues informally and to share ideas for promoting a positive literacy-learning environment. As the school year progressed, the staff demonstrated increased confidence and independence, with a number of teachers joining study groups and volunteering as workshop leaders and "turn-key" personnel. These outcomes suggested that the workshops were fulfilling their purpose of providing teachers with a scaffold until they were not only capable of demonstrating independence but also proficient in helping teacher colleagues become independent. The Westbury staff is aware that this transition toward becoming independent professionals takes time and that university support should be reduced gradually. As a result, the workshop presenter and his associates are nurturing a gradual release of responsibility from their leadership tasks to the staff's leadership functions. Specifically, teachers are being encouraged to continue their peer coaching, to maintain and share their reflective journals, and to expand and refine their study groups. These considerations have supported Westbury teachers and administrators in their efforts to become independent professionals who can enrich the overall growth and development of their community of learners.

Toward the end of the school year, the workshop participants reflected on the positive ways in which staff development impacted on their professional lives. They also made recommendations for the next school year, including:

- Faculty from the C.W. Post School of Education should conduct comparable workshops for the K-2 staff (who are housed in separate kindergarten and grades 1-2 buildings) so that all elementary school teachers and administrators (K-5) are on the "same page." In addition, the staffs of the Drexel Avenue School and Powell's Lane

School would benefit from several transitional workshops spread throughout the school year; these workshops should reinforce previous learning and also should provide new experiences that the Grades 3-5 teachers and administrators deem necessary.

- Westbury staff is encouraged to connect workshop activities to curriculum development and to align curricular outcomes to the New York State Education Department's standards for English language arts. Squires and Arrington (1999) provide useful approaches for defining the curriculum, balancing and aligning the curriculum, and assessing the curriculum.
- College faculty should continue to nurture Westbury's learning environment by observing and participating in classroom lessons and by supporting newly appointed turn-key personnel. In addition, college faculty are needed to assist study groups so they can become effective resources that complement staff development efforts (Sanacore, 1993). With appropriate assistance, study groups can learn to engage in teacher-researcher projects concerning such vital issues as improving the peer-coaching process. For example, members of study groups can profit from observational experiences and related projects that connect peer-coaching guides to models of teaching (Joyce, Weil, Calhoun, 2000).
- College faculty and Westbury staff need to develop stronger partnerships with parents so that all the key players are supporting children's literacy learning. Taylor (1983) and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) found that middle-class and low-income families support their children's literacy learning. Parents would therefore benefit from workshops that demonstrate genuine respect for the literacy-oriented activities

they are promoting at home. With this foundation established, workshop leaders can extend home contributions to the school setting (Sanacore, 2000). Parents also need opportunities to become resources for children other than their own and to share related insights and experiences with other parents (Cairney & Munsie, 1992a, 1992b, 1995; Sanacore, 1999; Swick, Grafwallner, Cockey, & Barton, 1998). Since a number of parents are in need of improving their own literacy, these parents would profit from special workshops that accommodate this need.

- Both formal and informal assessment should be administered to determine the effects of professional development and parental involvement on student achievement.

In retrospect, the Annenberg Foundation is supporting a comprehensive school-reform collaboration among the C. W. Post School of Education of Long Island University, the Yale University School Development Program, and the Westbury (New York) School District. Both school practitioners and university faculty are benefiting substantially from this collaboration, which is helping them develop profound insights about improving the learning environment of minority children. In a sense, the key players are demonstrating greater professional empowerment by reconceptualizing their roles as reflective, dialogical, and mindful educators (Kane & Snauwaert, 1999-2000). While not a panacea, these comprehensive efforts are providing a solid foundation for responding holistically and successfully to the strengths and needs of Westbury's community of learners.

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